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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 MC-02 ACDA-05 EB-07 OMB-01 COME-00

TRSE-00 STR-01 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /072 W
---------- 112083
P R 011137Z MAR 75
FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
TO SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
SECSTATE WASHDC 5344
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY OSLO
USMISSION NATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 1070

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, NL
SUBJ: F-104 REPLACEMENT: MOD STATE SECRETARY
STEMERDINK COMMENTS ON HIS BOSS

REF: HAGUE 645

1. DCM TOUCHED BASE WITH STATE SECRETARY STEMERDINK FEB 28 TO GET HIS ASSESSMENT RE THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY ON THE F-104 REPLACEMENT. DCM SAID HE GATHERED THAT MOD VREDELING WAS NO LONGER LEANING TOWARD THE MIRAGE. STEMERDINK AGREED BUT SAID THIS REPRESENTED A CHANGE FROM TIME OF DCM'S LAST CONVERSATION (FEB 7) WHEN STEMERDINK HAD SAID THAT VREDELING WAS DEFINITELY SWINGING TOWARD THE MIRAGE AS A MEANS OF SAVING THE "EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY".

2. STEMERDINK THEN, IN HIS USUAL CAUTIOUS, ELEPTICAL FASHION, INDICATED CONCERN THAT BELGIAN MOD VAN DEN BOEYNANTS WAS STILL COMMITTED TO THE MIRAGE. STEMERDINK EXPRESSED INTEREST IN GETTING
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A READING FROM EMBASSY BRUSSELS ON THIS POINT AS WELL

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AS THE GENERAL OUTLOOK FOR THE GOB'S EVENTUAL
DECISION. (CAN EMBASSY BRUSSELS OBLIGE?).

3. PIECE-DE-RESISTANCE OF THIS CONVERSATION WAS
STEMERDINK'S MINI-DIATRIBE AGAINST VREDELING FOR
NOT RPT NOT KEEPING HIS FENCES MENDED WITH HIS OWN
PARTY ON THE F-104 REPLACEMENT QUESTION. STEMERDINK
BLAMED VREDELING FOR CONSISTENTLY FAILING TO MEET
INFORMALLY WITH SMALL GROUPS OF LABOR PARLIAMENTARIANS
AND OTHER KEY LABOR PARTY FIGURES TO EXPLAIN WHY IT
WAS NECESSARY FOR THE NETHERLANDS TO REPLACE THE F-104'S
WITH A HIGH PERFORMANCE, NEXT GENERATION AIRCRAFT
SUITED FOR THE ROLE OF THE NETHERLANDS AIR FORCE IN
THE 1980'S. AS A RESULT, STEMERDINK CONTINUED, A
LOT OF PEOPLE IN VREDELING'S PARTY WERE TOTALLY UNCONVINCED
ON THIS POINT AND WERE THUS TAKING THE POSITION THAT
THE NETHERLANDS AIR FORCE COULD GET ALONG WITH A LESS
EXPENSIVE, LESS SOPHISTICATED REPLACEMENT FIGHTER SUCH AS
THE F-5E. VREDELING HAD NOT ATTEMPTED TO REASON WITH THESE
PEOPLE BUT INSTEAD, AS IN THE RECENT PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE
ON THE DEFENSE BUDGET, HAD FLATLY TOLD THEM HOW IT WAS
GOING TO BE. THIS WAS SIMPLY NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE LABOR
PARTY, STEMERDINK EMPHASIZED.

4. DCM INTERPOSED THAT IN ANY DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT
IMPORTANT ISSUES AROSE FROM TIME TO TIME WHERE MEMBERS
OF GOVERNMENT WERE UNABLE TO GAIN THE SUPPORT OF
THEIR PARTY DESPITE AN ABUNDANCE OF BRIEFINGS AND
DISCUSSIONS. IN THIS KIND OF SITUATION, DCM
CONTINUED, GOVERNMENT LEADERS HAD TO SHOW LEADERSHIP EVEN
AT THE RISK OF LOSING POPULARITY WITH THEIR OWN PARTY.
IF VARIOUS US ADMINISTRATIONS, FOR INSTANCE, HAD SETTLED FOR
WHAT THEY COULD HAVE GOTTEN THROUGH CONGRESS AT THE TIME, THE
HISTORY OF US FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICIES SINCE WW II WOULD
HAVE BEEN QUITE DIFFERENT.

5. STEMERDINK AGREED WITH THE GENERAL PROPOSITION
BUT REITERATED THAT VREDELING WAS IN SERIOUS TROUBLE
WITH HIS PARTY. RECALLING THAT HE HAD LECTURED
VREDELING MANY TIMES ON THE NEED TO EDUCATE HIS
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PARTY COLLEAGUES ON THE F-104 REPLACEMENT ISSUE,
STEMERDINK SAID HE HAD TALKED TO VREDELING AGAIN
JUST AN HOUR AGO AND WARNED HIM THAT HE MIGHT SOON BE
FINISHED AS DEFENSE MINISTER IF THE LABOR PARTY
WITHDREW ITS SUPPORT. IN RESPONSE TO DCM'S QUESTION,
STEMERDINK SAID THAT IT WAS LATE, VERY LATE, FOR
VREDELING, BUT THAT THERE WAS A CHANCE THAT HE MIGHT
STILL RETRIEVE THE SITUATION IF HE MOVED FAST TO CORRECT

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HIS PAST MISTAKES. ACCORDING TO STEMERDINK, VREDELING HAD FINALLY GOTTEN THE POINT, INDICATED THAT HE WAS NOW WORRIED ABOUT HIS POLITICAL CAREER AND PROMISED IN EFFECT TO GET CRACKING WITH HIS PARTY COLLEAGUES.

6. FOR CLOSERS, STEMERDINK MENTIONED THAT THE NEXT MEETING OF THE FOUR CONSORTIUM DEFENSE MINISTERS MIGHT WELL BE POSTPONED FROM MARCH 10 TO MARCH 17. IN THAT EVENT, THERE WOULD PROBABLY BE AT LEAST A WEEK'S DELAY IN GETTING THE FIGHTER REPLACEMENT ISSUE BEFORE THE NETHERLANDS COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, WHICH WAS SCHEDULED TO DISCUSS IT THE FIRST TIME ON MARCH 14.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY AIRCRAFT, ARMS PRODUCTION, MILITARY SALES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975THEHA01070
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750072-0960
From: THE HAGUE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750391/aaaaddzt.tel
Line Count: 129
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 HAGUE 645
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15 APR 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <16 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

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US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: F-104 REPLACEMENT: MOD STATE SECRETARY STEMERDINK COMMENTS ON HIS BOSS
TAGS: MASS, NL, NORTHROP, GENERAL DYNAMICS
To: DOD STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006